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Marketing for Entrepreneurs: How to Promote One's Own Craft

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MARKETING FOR ENTREPRENEURS: HOW TO PROMOTE ONE'S OWN CRAFT

by
Teresa Elise Hendrix

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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DEDICATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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for providing marketing expertise through your *Marketing Agents Podcast*

ABSTRACT

TERESA ELISE HENDRIX: Marketing for Entrepreneurs:
How to Promote One's Own Craft
(Under the direction of Scott Fiene)

This thesis seeks to serve as an alternative, cost efficient resource to those creative entrepreneurial ventures with a product (or service) that needs both people to consume it and a profit eventually sufficient to support its creators. By excluding excess details unrelated to promotion, and supplementing with specific, anecdotal advice directly from interviews with successful small business owners, this thesis aims to provide a plethora of marketing techniques that an entrepreneur can test before facing the daunting cost of an agency. Based on an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources*, this thesis explores three common components that manifest themselves in the marketing strategies of successful solo entrepreneurs: a continuously growing **network** of clients and peers that creates job opportunities, **new media** that provide low cost and user-friendly electronic marketing outlets, and product **differentiation** to create brands that consumers identify as valuable.

*Detailed research process and disclosures in Appendix A

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Introduction

“We did all the things that the marketing advice columns suggested...but we never were able to meet our sales necessity,” said Anna Gilbert, editor-in-chief of *Home & Hill* (Intro Fig. 1), a quarterly magazine by and about intriguing Tennesseans (Gilbert).



Intro Figure 1: *Home & Hill* (Burmeister 70-71)

However, quarterly magazines of similar aesthetic, price, and quality of content, such as *Anthology* (Intro Fig. 2), *Kinfolk*, and *Darling*, continue to print for an avid readership. Pondering this “cruel reality,” Gilbert mused that an advertising agency might have lured a sufficient audience, but recognizes that the “costs of that service may have doomed...[the publication] anyway” (Gilbert).



Intro Figure 2: *Anthology* (Nunn 88-89)

profit eventually sufficient to support its creators. While Gilbert and her team “gave supplemental content, linked to blog, engaged with followers and posted beautifully,” maybe there was something they were missing (Gilbert). The goal of this project was

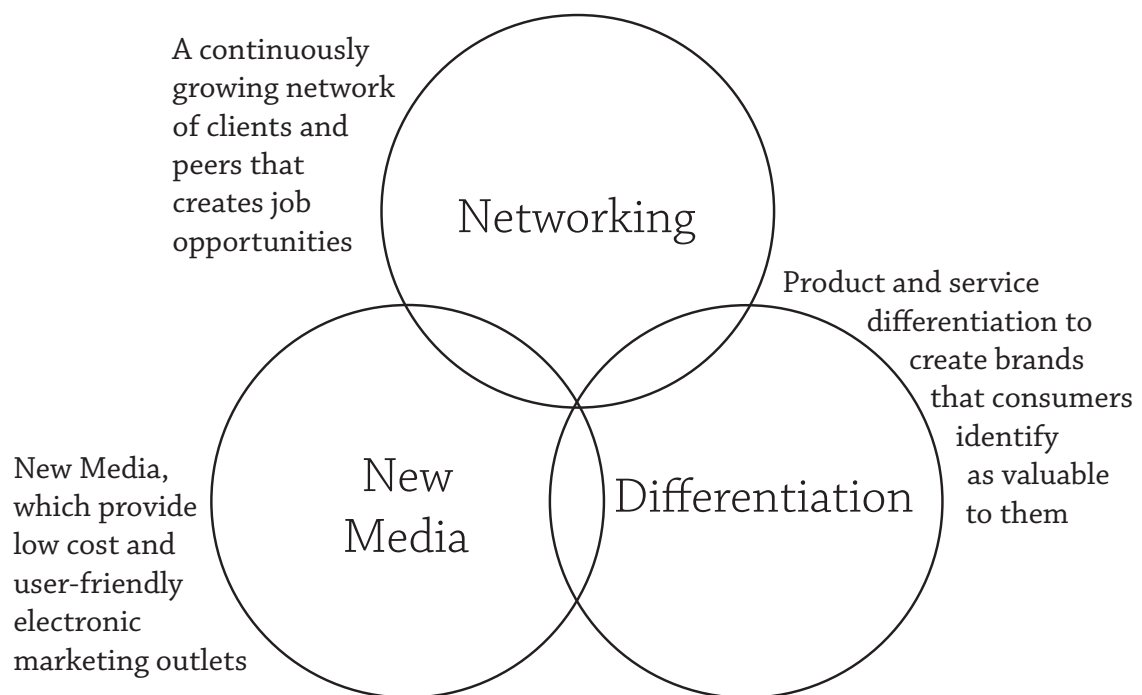
This thesis seeks to serve as an alternative, cost efficient resource to the *Home & Hill*'s of the American business world, those creative entrepreneurial ventures with a product (or service) that needs both people to consume it and a

to explore any methods of promotion that have helped solo entrepreneurs profit from their crafts. Then, the paper would present these findings more succinctly than a chapter book of case studies, but with more evidence and instruction than a brief “how to” article circulating Pinterest.

By excluding excess details unrelated to promotion, and supplementing with specific, anecdotal advice directly from interviews with successful small business owners, this thesis aims to provide a plethora of marketing techniques that an entrepreneur can test before facing the daunting cost of an agency.

Oil painter Dorothy Collier of Memphis, Tennessee, stresses that creative people begin their entrepreneurial pursuits by serving as their own “marketing departments,” without which she believes “I would be staring at unsold artwork in my studio all by myself” (Collier).

Based on an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources, this thesis explores three common components (Intro Fig. 3) that manifest themselves in the marketing strategies of successful solo entrepreneurs.



Intro Figure 3: Three common components found in marketing strategies of successful solo entrepreneurs

Chapter 1: Networking

Termed the “connection economy” by Direct Marketing Association Hall of Famer Seth Godin in his 2012 Startup School workshop turned podcast (Godin “Adjusting”), today’s cluttered media landscape rewards network-centered marketing strategies that allow one to avoid “constantly bothering people and using every marketing technique you can think to push...[a product] on people” (Godin “Freelancer”).

Proving that the “connection economy” is a familiar concept, without prompting, University of Mississippi student focus group participants defined an entrepreneur as someone who “uses networking skills to make connections for their business.” Participants also recognized “good partners,” connections, and a network among the most important tools for starting a business, and mirrored and reworded these sentiments throughout each of the two 30-minute focus groups.

Specifically connecting the practice of networking with business promotion, one participant summarized that an entrepreneur needs to “tell everyone” about his or her business. In his book *The \$100 Startup*, Chris Guillebeau describes networking as “promot(ing) in an authentic, non-sleazy manner,” which includes “supporting other people” in their business endeavors (Guillebeau 150). This fosters an ongoing relationship in which others can “put a face, personality, and conversation to a name,” explains San Franciscan photographer Thayer Allyson Gowdy in her interview for startup guide *Creative Inc.* (Ilasco 61).

Getting the Client

According to several entrepreneurs considered for this study, including the owners of Etsy shops Rachel’s Pet Paintings, Hilltop Designs HD, and Tina St. John Jewelry, requests started coming in from friends and family as soon as they put their talents up for sale. “You do one and it spreads from there,” explained Scott Chase, owner of Chase

Computer Services based in Tupelo, Mississippi (Chase). In Chase's case, "a couple people in our church that own businesses saw [the church website] I did," and with that, his business began (Chase).

Not all networks need be business-to-consumer though, as peers and fellow sellers can be great resources for success because "they may refer you to their clients when they are too busy to handle a job or if they feel you may be a better fit" (Ilasco 68). For *Eat Drink Delta* author and freelance journalist Susan Puckett, sales, projects and "opportunities to promote" come from many "different networks...from school friends, to former newspaper colleagues, to fellow conference attendees, to running buddies, to dog-walkers in my neighborhood," and more specifically from "building and maintaining these relationships" (Puckett).

School & Work

Like Puckett, Memphis oil painter Dorothy Collier maintains relationships with "artist friends from college and in...[her] community so...[she] can bounce ideas off of them" (Collier). One such relationship with a professor turned into a "gig doing motion graphics for Linkin Park" for Chris Riehl, a Los Angeles based animator featured in *Creative Inc.* (Ilasco 16). If an artist is self-taught, *Creative Inc.* suggests "duplicat(ing) the camaraderie found at school by immersing yourself in online communities of like-minded creatives through blogs, forums, and social networking sites" (16).

Creative Inc. proceeds to identify past professional connections as future freelance employers, because former employees, unlike outsiders, would not need to study the company itself before launching into a project (68). Graphic designer Andrew Almeter agrees that "as soon as you tell former colleagues about your new venture, you'd be surprised how many will refer you for potential jobs" (148).

For a better chance at being remembered by anyone—friends and coworkers alike—San Franciscan photographer Thayer Allyson Gowdy in her *Creative Inc.* interview suggests a physical "leave-behind, like a postcard" (Fig. 1.1), basically something your connection "can put...on their wall to remember you" (61).



Figure 1.1: “Leave-behind” example (Price)

Telling Everyone

Besides friends and former coworkers, a solo entrepreneur has the option of telling everyone he or she encounters in his or her daily life and business. “I got a blog writing job the last time I got my haircut,” said freelance writer Natalie Higdon of Memphis, Tennessee (Higdon). Another believer in the nonconventional networking situation, Premium Productions’ Allen Pegues from Tupelo, Mississippi expresses the importance of a simple “Hey, How are you doing?” even while hand washing in the restroom (Pegues). In a more formal networking situation, Pegues says he would be “finding out what’s coming up...on their schedule, and letting them know how [he] can be of service to them” (Pegues).

Other creative community promotions are self-sufficient. Christine Weber of Etsy shop Hilltop Designs uses a “car...window cling” to naturally announce her business as she is travelling throughout her community (Eleazu “Hilltop Designs”). In his Startup School podcast, Seth Godin gives examples of how “the act of running their business” is a promotion technique in itself for some clever entrepreneurs (Godin “Appealing”). For instance, a fortune cookie distributor gives special pricing to customers who permit his web address to accompany the custom fortunes they purchase for parties. Additionally, Godin gives the example of city “Duck tours,” which are conducted with boats that can travel on land and water. Passengers use noisemakers that sound like ducks’ quacks, naturally attracting attention to the boat, on which is printed the contact information for the business (“Appealing”).

Networking Tools

Regardless of how effective the aforementioned networking techniques may be, as one University of Mississippi focus group participant expressed, some entrepreneurs may feel the need for a specific “networking tool to make them feel comfortable putting themselves out there.”

Events: Many sellers consulted for this thesis mentioned participation in marketplaces and events as opportunities for natural, almost automatic growth for their networks. Food blogger Cara Greenstein began attracting the attention of “local and national influencers in the food and entertainment categories” by partnering with Austin, Texas restaurant NoVa on an event designed for “friends, bloggers, and photographers” to get a “taste” of her blog *Caramelized* through a “specialized menu” (Fig. 1.2) that matched her newly revitalized editorial brand (Greenstein). Additionally, using profits from “mini mason jars of holiday cocktail garnishes with branded tags and free recipe cards” (Fig. 1.3), Greenstein “sponsored an indie holiday market” in Memphis, Tennessee to “convert *Caramelized* from a website to an in-person experience,” while introducing herself to “friendly faces and supporters” (Greenstein).

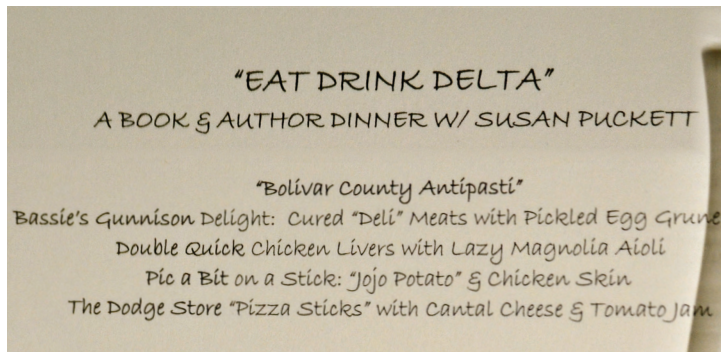


Figure 1.2: *Eat Drink Delta*-inspired menu
Similar to Greenstein’s blog-themed event menu, this menu was inspired by Susan Puckett’s book and created by Chef Wally Joe.



Figure 1.3: Greenstein’s booth at the Memphis Indie Holiday Market (“Come join”)

As the host of the 2014 Association of Food Journalists Conference, *Eat Drink Delta* author Susan Puckett advises any event participant to improve his or her public speaking skills by “join(ing) Toastmasters, experiment(ing) with YouTube videos, [or]

listen(ing) to TED talks” in order to attract more “more speaking engagements and other media opportunities...to spread your message and sell your product/service” (Puckett).

Business Incubators: Not only can entrepreneurs *briefly* join forces for markets and events, but also they can join a business incubator or coworking space in which entrepreneurs conduct business, sharing the cost of certain office amenities and coming

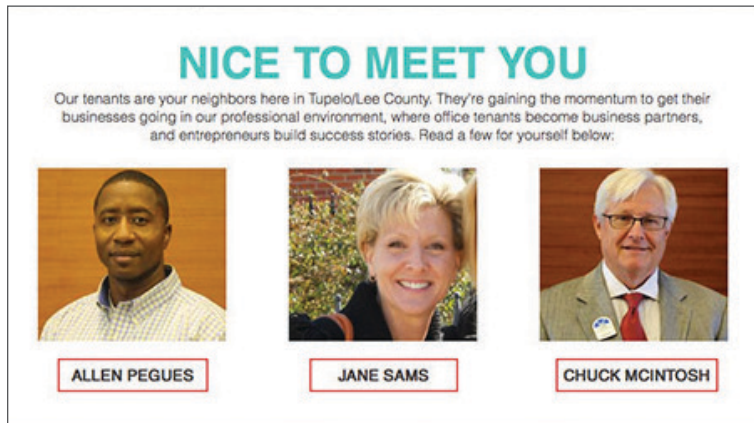


Figure 1.4: Renasant Center for Ideas tenants

together for various types of business training and networking opportunities.

Every tenant (Fig. 1.4) interviewed at one such business incubator in Tupelo, Mississippi, The Renasant Center for Ideas (RCFI), had either gotten

business with the help of a fellow tenant, or had partnered with a fellow tenant on a professional project.

“I actually got my first case through connections at the Renasant Center,” explained Jane Sams, a new franchisee of Visiting Angels, an in-home senior care service (Sams). Web entrepreneur Scott Chase said he partners with fellow tenants regularly, especially “the videographer in the building,” since their services often coincide (Chase). “There are other people [at the Renasant Center for Ideas] on the same track as you are; you can get energy from them, and it’s a great place to network,” summarized Chuck McIntosh of McIntosh Creative Services (McIntosh).

Affiliate Programs: Another type of partnership in selling and networking is an affiliate program. For example, Hilltop Designs’ Christine Weber uses in-home gatherings (Fig. 1.5) organized by “9 consultants, who...in their hometown communities are representing the Hilltop product and directing their customers to the Etsy shop” (Eleazu “Hilltop Designs”).



Figure 1.5: Invitations for Hilltop Designs HD home parties (Hilltop)

Derek Gehl an *Entrepreneur* magazine online contributor, explains that with affiliate programs, a “reseller” working for an entrepreneur earns a recommended “40 to 50 percent” commission on his or her sales, making it a “low-risk option” because “you [as the entrepreneur] only pay [affiliates] when you make money” (Gehl).

An affiliate program can now be automated through online services like Framestr, which is the creation of Toronto entrepreneur Jordan Whelan. Framestr is a website that allows businesses to give commissions to supporters who get their friends to purchase their products. These “ambassadors” can promote products (Fig. 1.6) to their friends by “embedding little stores on blogs and websites” or by using a special link in emails and social media posts (Eleazu “Framestr”). Then ambassadors receive predetermined percentage commissions in their Framestr accounts for each sale made through their respective links. According to Whelan, “we all...have these social circles around us,” so “why not use them to help your business...launch?” (“Framestr”).



Figure 1.6: Framestr Listing (Drifted Jewellery)

Word of Mouth

In his book *The \$100 Startup*, Chris Guillebeau suggests actively organizing different networks, by “mak(ing) a list of at least fifty people and divid(ing) them into categories (colleagues from a former job, college friends, acquaintances, etc.)” and notifying them when launching a new product or service (Guillebeau 151). Beyond notification, Guillebeau advises that these messages should be “inviting them to participate...[by] joining a contact list...and letting other people know about the project” (151). Ultimately, networking efforts can turn into word of mouth promotion, but only if networking relationships are actively maintained and utilized properly.

Retaining the Client

Relationships

“Everybody wants to feel special and everybody wants to be taken care of,” said Tina St. John, a Southwestern jewelry artist interviewed on Ijeoma Eleazu’s Etsy Conversations podcast (Eleazu “Tina St. John”). St. John fosters relationships with those in her network through “postcards...coupon code(s)” and continued “communication” (“Tina St. John”).

In their book *Creative Inc.*, artistic entrepreneurs Meg Ilasco and Joy Cho compare networks to “any successful friendship or marriage” in that they “require love, dedication, and trust to foster a long-term, happy relationship” (Ilasco 75). They



Figure 1.7: Sample holiday card for clients

believe this effort to be worthwhile because “despite the surplus of talent available, buyers like working with freelancers they know and trust” (14). Specifically, Ilasco and Cho suggest a “quarterly e-newsletter or postcard announcing recent awards, press coverage, or new work” or (Fig 1.7) a “holiday card or small gift at the end

of the year” to turn one time sales into “boomerang” business (89).

Entrepreneur magazine’s Mark Gehl has several other ideas for emails designed for customer relationship management, including “free reports on topics your market would appreciate...offers for products...complementary to ones you may have already offered,” and “free product trials” (Gehl). He also suggests “autoresponders” that are immediately emailed to customers when they “opt-in” for your communications (Gehl).

Social Proof

While maintaining relationships within their current networks, entrepreneurs can also use their current networks to attract new customers. Besides gaining traditional referrals from current customers, entrepreneurs can employ neuromarketing tactics that specifically showcase their current clientele to grow their networks.

According to Orbit Media cofounder Andy Crestodina, “neuromarketing” seeks to affect consumers’ perceptions of products or brands using psychological techniques, particularly ones that involve the “cognitive biases” most humans hold (Brooks “Neuromarketing”). Specifically, Crestodina suggests entrepreneurs leverage the “cognitive bias” of “social proof.” He explains that social proof is what “nightclubs” generate when they are “half empty [but] still make people wait in line behind that velvet rope so that passersby can see it looks popular” (“Neuromarketing”). Social proof

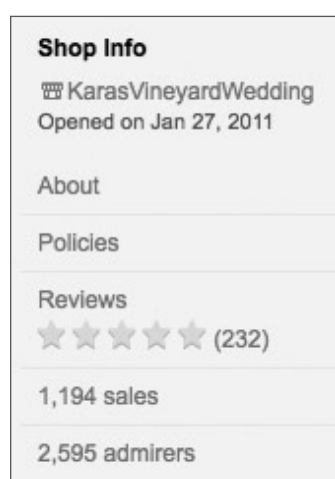


Figure 1.8: Social proof on Etsy with reviews, sales, and admirers

draws on human “herd behavior,” or the idea that “people tend to do what other people do” (“Neuromarketing”). In an entrepreneur’s case, Crestodina defines social proof as “making any action other than hiring you seem really weird” (“Neuromarketing”).

Crestodina also has several ideas about how to generate and display social proof (Fig. 1.8). He explains that “1,000 tweets and 100 Facebook ‘likes’” makes content much more likely to be respected and shared than if it only “got 1 tweet and 4 Facebook ‘likes’” (“Neuromarketing”). Other

ways Crestodina suggests “mak(ing) people worry about missing out” are posting a “countdown clock” until Christmas or “writ(ing) a blog post about the things that might go wrong” without this product or service (“Neuromarketing”).

In *The \$100 Startup*, Chris Guillebeau also advocates for the use of “social proof” when he encourages entrepreneurs to ask their “best customers” to reveal “their own [unique] stories about how they’ve been helped through your business” (Guillebeau 190). Guillebeau also believes it is important to “be specific” when requesting referrals by asking a customer to “send our offer to three of your friends” or like a social media page (191).

Crestodina would add that personalization is an important quality in a testimonial, and that “video testimonials” in particular are “the atomic bomb of marketing” (Brooks “Neuromarketing”). For instance, online project management service Basecamp found a “102% increase in conversions after adding a picture” to a person’s testimonial (“Neuromarketing”).

Networking in Summary

As University of Mississippi focus group participants stated, “word of mouth is everything” because “you would rather hire someone you do know” and “knowing the right people is important for credibility.” College students who have not necessarily studied entrepreneurship echo the same values as experts in the field, so there is already some awareness of the power of networking, but the aforementioned techniques are what can channel this power for entrepreneurs specifically.

Chapter 2: New Media

“We are so lucky to be in the digital age where you can share your work from your own home or studio,” said oil painter Dorothy Collier, who also quoted Austin Kleon’s *Steal Like an Artist* by affirming, “geography is no longer the enemy” (Collier). Chris Guillebeau seems to agree in *The \$100 Startup*, as he gives the example of a “handyman” who “used to put up flyers at the grocery store,” but now “advertises through Google to people searching for ‘kitchen cabinet installation’ in their city” (Guillebeau 7).

For entrepreneurs, new media—including but not limited to email, social media, websites, search engine optimization, blogs, and online marketplaces—are opportunities for cost efficient promotion and in some instances an expectation of one’s audience. The obscurity lies in the decision of which media to use and how to use them. While the answers differ based on each business’s target audience, this section uncovers the appropriate usage of numerous components of “new media” in an effort to provide some clarity for entrepreneurs eager to engage with potential and current customers electronically.

Email

Email was previously discussed in this thesis as a method of maintaining relationships with a current network of customers. However, email can also be used to gain new clients. Matt Lamothe, a Chicago web designer interviewed in *Creative Inc.* asserts that “approach(ing) people you admire and want to work with” through email “gives you a bit of anonymity” versus “cold-calling or soliciting face-to-face” (Ilasco 41).

Dan Fagella, owner of email marketing agency CLV Boost, suggests asking consumers for not only their email addresses but also specific characteristics pertaining to one’s business. He claims this ensures “front-end communication (is) hardcore tailored to convert very...quickly” (Brooks “Email”). For instance, with Fagella’s “martial

arts business,” each email was tailored to the customer’s designated “weight class” (“Email”). Fagella also recommends “model(ing)” one’s “ratio of offer to education, to testimonial-type emails” after the email campaign of a successful business that is similar to one’s own (“Email”). Then, an entrepreneur can further target his or her emails by—for example—only sending an “explicit” offer to those who have opened an “educational...message” earlier in the “week” (“Email”).

For subject lines, Fagella cites HubSpot’s findings that “6-10 words” perform

“generally best” (“Email”). Additionally, for mobile, Fagella suggests placing what is most important in the “earlier words” of the subject line, since the viewer cannot or will not read more than that in his or her mobile inbox (“Email”). For links within the body of an email, Fagella suggests putting them “on their own line,” in bold type that is “2 point sizes bigger” than the surrounding copy, so that any size “thumb” can select the link, and no reader has to “squint” to find the link (“Email”).

An affordable tool for creating email campaigns is MailChimp (Fig. 2.1), which can keep track of how many clicks and opens an email receives. MailChimp also offers straightforward design tools like themes and layout templates, as well as coding options for the more advanced designer (“Features”).

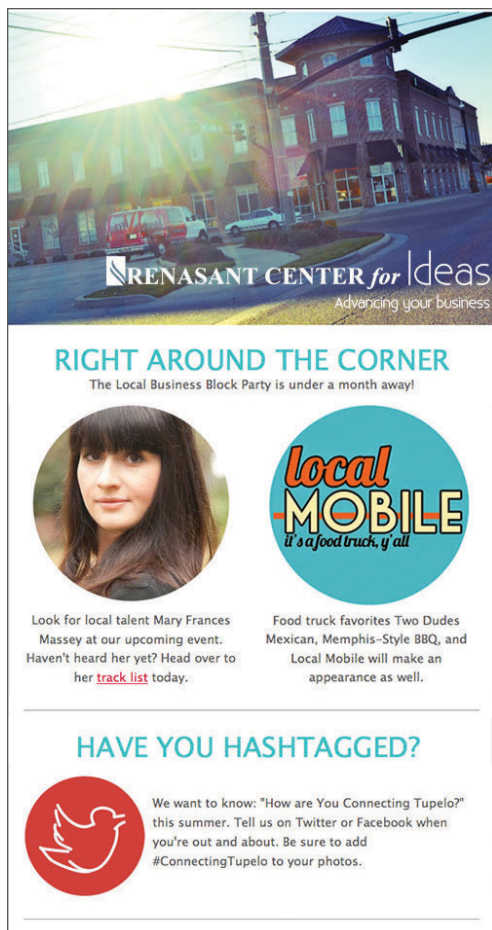


Figure 2.1: Email example created with MailChimp design tools

Social Media

“Having these free tools is such a gift for those of us without budgets for marketing campaigns,” said freelance author Susan Puckett about social media (Puckett).

Similarly, for food blogger Cara Greenstein, “social media has been a huge factor in brand awareness and growth” of her business (Greenstein). Jamie Turner, 60 Second Communications agency founder, argues that the active presence of a business on social media means consumers may be thinking, “This company is always looking for new ways to reach out to me,” generating a “positive brand impression” (Brooks “Mobile”).

This section will discuss Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, but determining which medium or media to use for a particular business can be challenging. *Entrepreneur* online contributor Jonathan Long suggests choosing “two or three social-media platforms” in order to “engage” with the brand audience “on a more personal level,” yielding a “loyal following that will share your content” (Long). On *The Marketing Agents* podcast, host Rich Brooks advises entrepreneurs to select social media platforms based on not only their “audiences” but also which platform they, the entrepreneurs, are “naturally drawn to because” of personal strengths and weaknesses (Brooks “Market Your Business”). For instance, Brooks suggests those with a “great eye” for the visual might be best on Instagram, while those who always “have the perfect quip for an occasion” might perform best on Twitter (“Market Your Business”).

Once an entrepreneur has chosen the social media he or she will be using, *Entrepreneur* online contributor Ann Smarty advises using the same or similar profile pictures for each social medium to ensure that audiences “recognize” the business “throughout all the communities” in which it has a presence (Smarty). For examples of the most effective posts on Facebook, Twitter, or Pinterest, BuzzSumo is a tool that shows content that has excelled in terms of shares in many different categories (Brooks “Inbound Links”).

Another challenge for entrepreneurs could be finding the time to remain active on whatever social media outlets they choose. In *The \$100 Startup*, Chris Guillebeau explains how social media activity can consist of a “series of quick check-ins” and need not “take any longer than ten to fifteen minutes a day” (Guillebeau 161). Guillebeau’s strategy is “maintain(ing) a text file of information and links to share, and a couple of

times a day...go(ing) online and post(ing)” them, while also checking and replying to “messages” (161).

While content should differ from one social medium to another, Guillebeau has general advice for all social media content. He believes that while “sharing links to interesting articles is fine,” followers are most “interested in...you...and your business” (199). He explains that the way to gain “more Twitter followers” is actually by “do(ing) something interesting...away from Twitter” (199). However, for solo entrepreneurs especially, Meg Ilasco and Joy Cho of *Creative Inc.* also advise creating separate social media profiles for personal use and professional use because certain personal content could “affect how potential clients view you as a professional” (Ilasco 68).

Instagram

Perfection Chocolates president John Kapos of Australia has found Instagram to be “great for photos and telling a story...behind the scenes” so that the audience “starts seeing your personality” (Brooks “Market Your Business”). His Instagram followers



Figure 2.2: Secondary comments on Instagram are outlined in red above (Abbott)

have appreciated his engagement “with them human to human, not business to business” (“Market Your Business”). One of Kapos’ tips for fellow business owners using Instagram is typing hashtags in the “second comment” below the photo (Fig. 2.2), because the user can “delete” and repost that comment in order to “refresh” the post in Instagram hashtag searches (“Market Your Business”).

Instagram Basics for Your Business author Sue B. Zimmerman also suggests that a business owner create a “custom, unique hashtag” and place it in his or her

Instagram bio so followers can use it whenever they mention that particular business (Brooks “Grow Your Business”). That business’s content will have much stronger visibility in a “custom” hashtag search than it would have in a “popular hashtag” search (“Grow Your Business”). Essentially, Zimmerman believes that in order to “attract your ideal client,” usage of Instagram must be “super niche-y” (“Grow Your Business”).

Zimmerman also has several strategies for follower engagement. It begins with the “icon with the heart in it,” which notifies the account holder when he or she has new likes, comments, or followers, as well as when a friend from Facebook joins Instagram (“Grow Your Business”). Zimmerman maintains a “spreadsheet” of followers, and sends direct messages to “up to 15 people” at a time, thanking them for “following this account” (“Grow Your Business”). She also adds “text instagal to ##,” at which point she

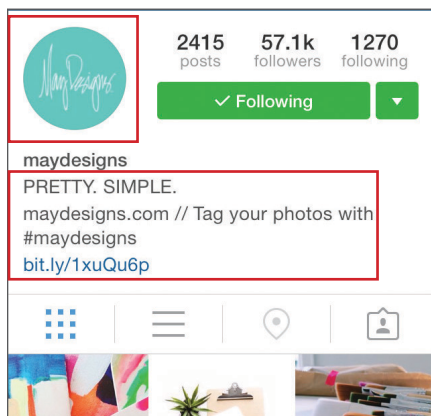


Figure 2.3: Instagram bio outlined in red (“May Designs”)

text messages them a PDF file of one of her articles, adding free content and direct engagement to her simple “thank you” (“Grow Your Business”). This strategy has allowed her to gain on average 25 new contacts daily.

Zimmerman also has several pieces of advice to improve an Instagram bio (Fig. 2.3) (“Grow Your Business”).

- Employ the bio link “as a call to action,” such as “Buy tickets here,’ with an arrow.”
- Choose a simple image or logo for the bio picture since “it’s smaller than a dime.”
- To help the right audience choose to follow the account, “state exactly what you’re going to deliver in your content” in the bio.



Figure 2.4: Instagram geotag outlined in red (“The cutest”)

Another Instagram feature that Zimmerman uses regularly is the geotag (or location) that can be added to each post (Fig. 2.4). She explains a geotag as “letting people know where you’re doing business” so

that “they might be able to connect with you in person” (“Grow Your Business”).

Two external tools that can aid Instagram user performance are “ScheduGram,” which allows users to “schedule...posts” and “Iconosquare” (Fig. 2.5) (“Grow Your Business”). Iconosquare shows “statistics” of the user’s most successful photo filters and new followers, as well as a “pie chart of...engagement” and “graphs” demonstrating the “best time to post based on your engagement” (“Grow Your Business”). It also has options to create photo widgets for websites and custom tabs for Facebook pages.

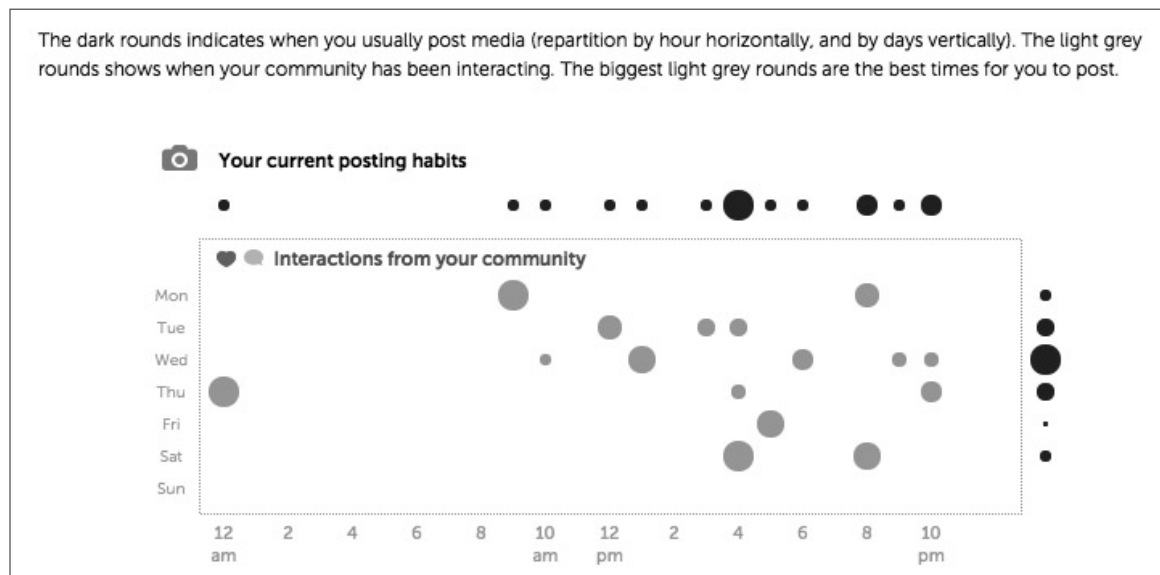


Figure 2.5: Sample of Iconosquare analysis

Facebook

Jewelry designer Tina St. John demonstrates how many freelancers and entrepreneurs closely tie Facebook to ecommerce. St. John posts her Etsy listings on Facebook (Fig. 2.6) along with “a quote that’s related” to the product’s subject, such as “roses” for “rose leaf earrings” (Eleazu “Tina St. John”). However, since 2013, Facebook has been changing the way businesses can use their services through new algorithms that sort the content of their approximately 1.2 billion users, favoring paid promotion over organic efforts (Brooks “Facebook”).

Internet advertising veteran Rick Mulready, who “has worked with...AOL [and] Yahoo,” urges Facebook business users to consider “page post ad(s)” over the “boost

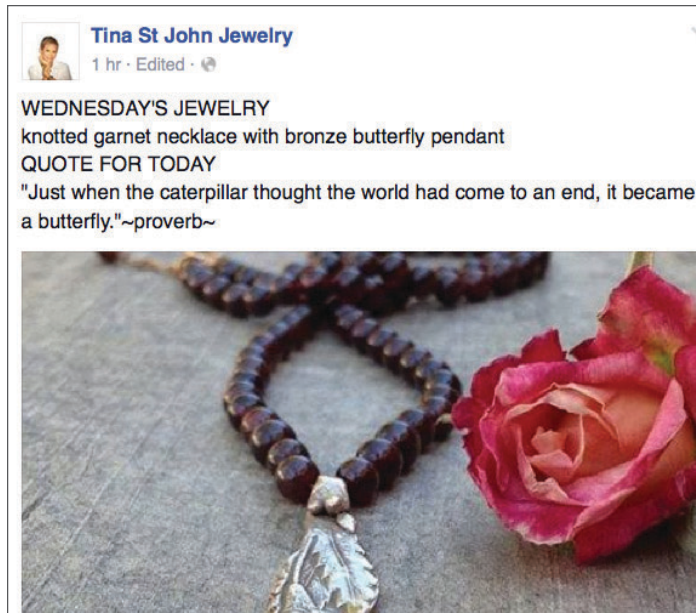


Figure 2.6: Tina St. John's posts ("Wednesday's")

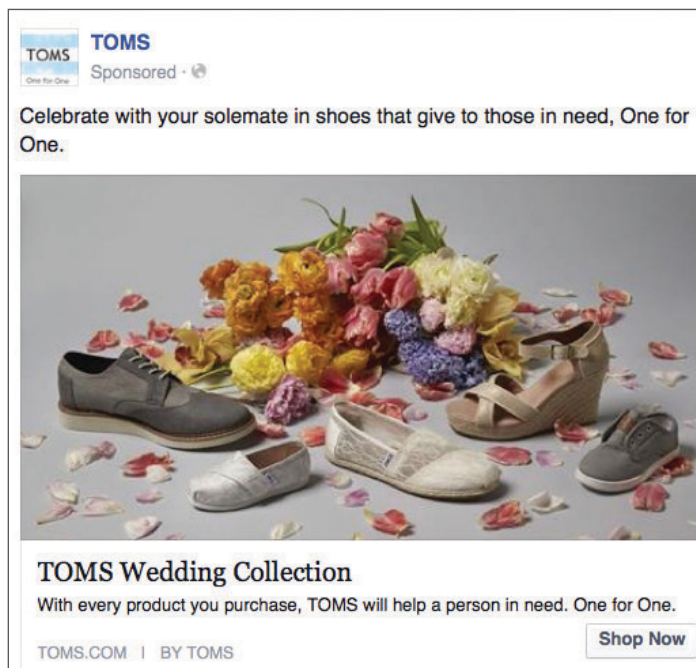


Figure 2.7: Facebook page post ad (TOMS)

post" option, which has "limited targeting capabilities and... budget levels" ("Facebook"). In particular, Mulready advocates for "unpublished page post ad(s)" (Fig. 2.7), which can host "more text above the image" and appear "like a status update" but are not posted on the business's page ("Facebook"). This "unpublished" feature allows "4, 5, 6 different ads" to be targeted at unique demographics, without "spamming" all fans with multiple ads on their newsfeeds ("Facebook").

Entrepreneur online contributor Anna James notes an external tool that can be used to improve a business's Facebook presence: PageModo. PageModo supplies free "custom cover photos, additional tabs and unique landing pages," with

"upgrades start(ing) at \$6.25 per month" (James).

Ultimately though, Mulready believes Facebook's purpose in a business's promotional plan should be to send consumers to its "email list or...website" (Brooks "Facebook"). Mulready explains that a business does not "own" its Facebook profile

or fans, but it does “own” customers who opt in to its mailing list or actively visit its website (“Facebook”).

Twitter

“From the comfort of my own home, I can connect to people and really build meaningful relationships that lead to business benefits,” said *The Tao of Twitter* author Mark Schaefer about Twitter (Brooks “Twitter”). In addition to networking opportunities, Schaefer sees Twitter as a market research tool. For instance, while working with a Toronto realtor, Schaefer discovered “24 tweets in a 48-hour period” that included “moving to Toronto,” which translates to 24 “potential clients looking for a realtor” (“Twitter”).



Figure 2.8: Twitter list (outlined in red)

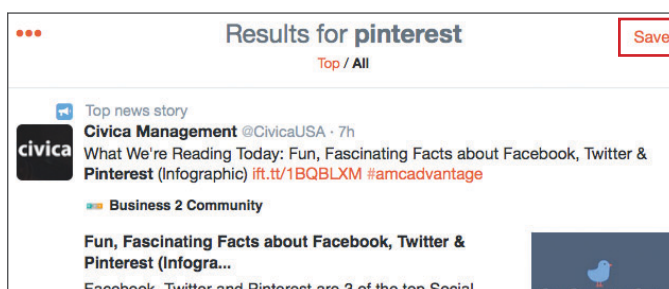


Figure 2.9: Twitter searches can be saved on the results page (outlined in red)

Twitter lists (Fig. 2.8), chats, and advertising are the other tools Schaefer suggests for entrepreneurs. A Twitter user can make lists of “customers... competitors...local friends” and influencers, as well as save

their most frequent “searches” (Fig. 2.9) in order to efficiently glean valuable insight from Twitter communities on a daily basis (“Twitter”). Twitter chats allow the user to

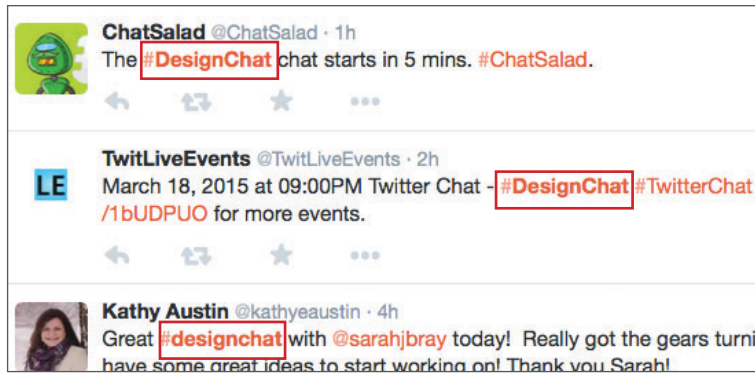


Figure 2.10: Example of a Twitter chat, #designchat



Figure 2.11: LuLu paid for 15 retweets, but will not pay if users engage with those retweets (Lulu Beauty Co)

a follower “engages with” their “promoted tweet” by retweeting, clicking, or favoriting it (“Twitter”). However, if that follower’s “thousands of followers...engage with” the retweet, the advertiser does not pay for those secondary engagements (“Twitter”). Essentially, the Twitter advertiser “only pay(s) for the original audience” engagement (Fig. 2.11) (“Twitter”).



Figure 2.12: Twitter bio

“connect with [and follow] like minded people,” (Fig. 2.10), and they can be found by searching, “list of Twitter chats” on Google (“Twitter”).

Twitter advertising can reach “highly targeted demographics,” such as users “within 10 miles of your zip code who are talking about pizza” (“Twitter”). Twitter advertisers “only pay” when

To gain followers in the first place, *Entrepreneur* online contributor Jimmy Burgess suggests following some “competitors” followers, so they might “follow you back” (Burgess). He also suggests using the Twitter bio (Fig. 2.12) for “telling...[potential followers] what’s in it for them,” instead of hoping a “favorite quote” or family fact might attract them to follow the account (Burgess).

For best response on Twitter, Burgess recommends tweeting “Monday to Thursday from

1 p.m. to 3 p.m.” and avoiding “times...after 3 p.m. on Fridays and any other evening after 8 p.m.” (Burgess). Burgess and fellow *Entrepreneur* contributor Anna James advocate the use of several external tools to analyze and improve a user’s performance.

- Buffer and HootSuite users can “schedule tweets” in advance for the best times for engagement (Burgess; James)
- Hashtagify helps users discover “the most engaging hashtags” (Burgess).
- Social Rank identifies a user’s “most engaged and most valuable” followers (James).
- Tweroid indicates the “level of engagement” of each tweet (James).

Pinterest

“For me, Pinterest was a great platform to...show off my blog post almost like a magazine cover,” said Vincent Ng, author of *Pinterest to Profits with Pintalysis* (Brooks “Pinterest”). As Ng describes it, Pinterest posts, or Pins, should always be linked to content, such as a blog post, because Pinterest is “really a place for discovery and a resource” (“Pinterest”). For a business, this means linking to content related to the “lifestyle” of its “customers” (“Pinterest”). Ng gives the example of athletic-wear brand Lululemon linking to “a blog post about dry shampoo,” which their active clientele might use (“Pinterest”).

Pins are placed in a user’s categories called boards. Board names and descriptions and Pin descriptions can improve visibility for Pins and their linked content. Vincent Ng recommends long board names and descriptions (Fig. 2.13) and detailed Pin descriptions to give the content the potential to appear earlier in Google

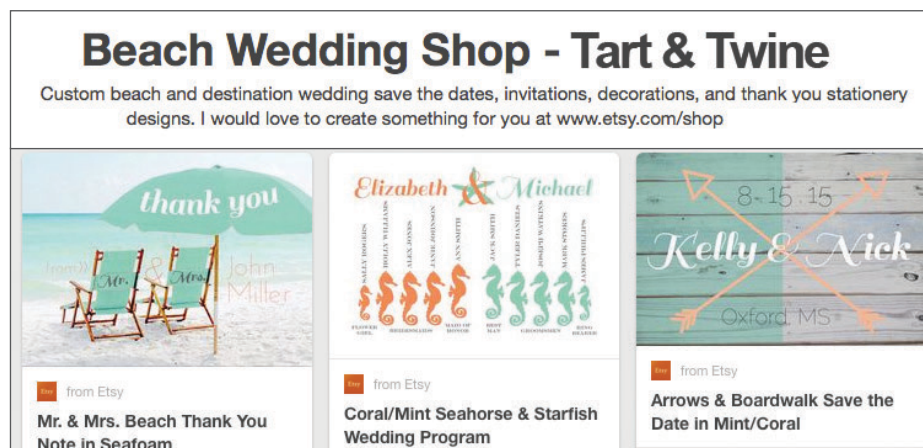


Figure 2.13: Example of a long Pinterest board name and description

searches. When creating these names and descriptions, Pinner should consider the keywords that their audience might use to search for that type of content (“Pinterest”).

Edit Board / [X]

Name: Suite Like Tee (Blog)

Description: What's your board about?

Category: Other

Change Cover: Change Cover

Add a map? Yes ☐

Who can add Pins? [Learn more](#) Type a name or email

Figure 2.14: Group board option outlined in red above

To connect with fellow Pinner and attract “relevant followers,” Ng suggests “starting your own group board” (Fig. 2.14) on a particular subject and “curat(ing) the content” that others Pin to it (“Pinterest”). Also, because Pinterest’s new “smart feed” renders “it difficult to see certain Pins,” a user often actually has to visit a fellow Pinner’s profile to view and repin their Pins (“Pinterest”). Therefore, Ng explains that repinning others’ Pins “really helps you stand out”

because it obviously took “extra effort” to do so (“Pinterest”).

Another feature Pinterest users can employ to make their content unique is the place Pin (Fig. 2.15). By selecting the geographical location of their Pins, Pinner can emphasize their local appeal (“Pinterest”).

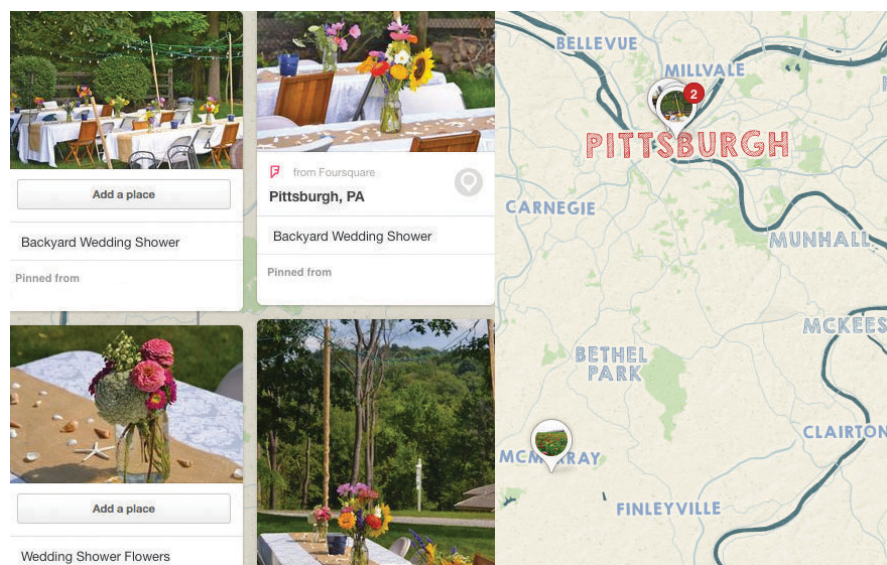
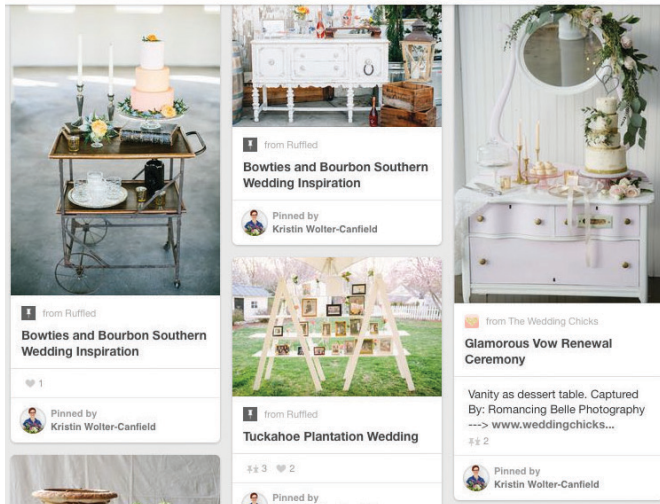


Figure 2.15: Place pins on a board

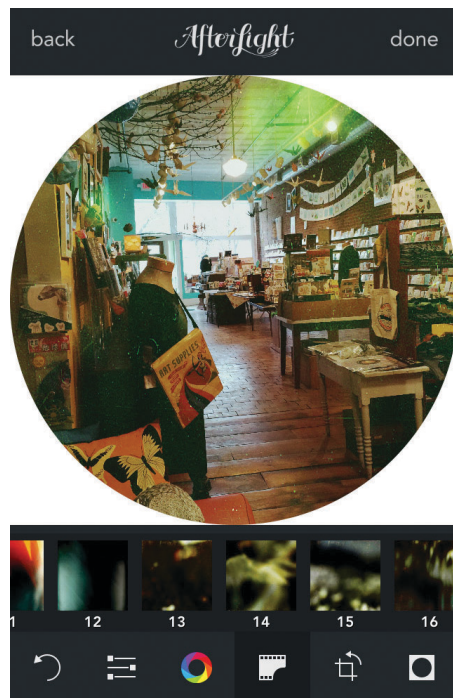
There are also certain characteristics of Pinterest and its users to consider to ensure the best performance. According to ecommerce blog *MadeFreshly*, Pinterest users are “80% female” and “20% male,” which is a consideration in terms of content



for Pins (*MadeFreshly*). Other considerations for Pin content (Fig. 2.16) include *MadeFreshly*’s statistics that “lighter images are repined 20x more than dark ones,” and “images without faces get 23% more repins” (*MadeFreshly*).

Also according to *MadeFreshly*, “Saturday mornings and weekdays

Figure 2.16: Light images and no faces (Propcellar) 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. EST and 8 p.m.



– 1 a.m. EST” are the most effective time periods in which to be active on Pinterest (*MadeFreshly*).

MadeFreshly also found certain topics to be dominant on particular days, including “fitness” on Mondays, “technology” on Tuesdays, “inspirational quotes” on Wednesdays, “fashion” on Thursdays, “humor” on Fridays, “travel” on Saturdays, and “food and craft ideas” on Sundays (*MadeFreshly*).

Entrepreneur online contributor Anna James suggests the use of PinAlerts, which notifies its users when someone “pins something directly from their site” (James). Another free tool for Pinterest,

Figure 2.17: Afterlight application Facebook, and Instagram, is the photo editing application Afterlight (Fig. 2.17). This smartphone application has many more filters than Instagram and also includes shape frames, vintage effects, and light effects.

Website

While social media are important tools for entrepreneurs, Orbit Media cofounder Andy Crestodina warns against large, colorful social media buttons placed at the top of a business's website because they are "sending people away from your website," where they could get distracted by "millions of cat videos" and never return (Brooks "Neuromarketing").

In their book *Creative Inc.*, Meg Ilasco and Joy Cho describe a website as a tool that "works while you sleep and while you're on vacation" to continue "making connections, and wooing clients" (Ilasco 56). They suggest a "short and simple domain name" and a simple website as well because potential customers "may stick around for only three to five clicks on your site" (56-7).

Ilasco and Cho also stress the importance of writing concise project descriptions—avoiding technical "jargon"—to help "work come alive" on a website (70). Additionally,



they believe a frequently asked questions (FAQ) page (Fig. 2.18) should be created to replace consumers' "objections" with "confidence" in purchasing what the website offers (120-1).

However, Crestodina tells entrepreneurs, "never

make a testimonials page," because website statistics often show very few visitors to testimonial pages ("Neuromarketing"). Rather, he advocates for placing "proof literally pixels away from the claim" by using testimonials throughout the website pages ("Neuromarketing").

For an "email signup box," Crestodina recommends using social proof, a promise,

and prominence (“Neuromarketing”). Social proof could be the number of subscribers if it is substantial, or it could be “an email from a happy subscriber” (“Neuromarketing”). The promise describes the content or frequency of emails the subscriber can expect (Fig. 2.19), and prominence is the location of the signup box on the webpage (“Neuromarketing”).

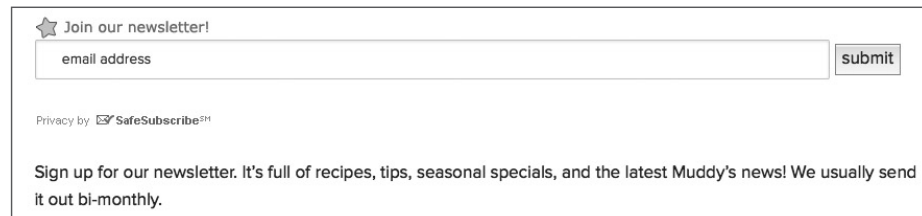


Figure 2.19: Example of an email signup on a website (“Get the News”)

Mobile Adaptability

“Back in 2012 ComScore predicted that mobile traffic would exceed desktop traffic in 2014, and they were correct,” said Market Domination Media founder Jonathan Long in his article “6 Changes Your 2015 SEO Strategy Must Focus On” (Long). Additionally notable is SearchEngineLand.com Director of Audience Engagement Monica Wright’s claim that business professionals access their email inboxes on their smartphones “more than 50% of the time” (Brooks “Mobile”). Monica Wright, Andrew Shotland, and Jamie Turner—all digital marketing experts and guests on *The Marketing Agents Podcast*—agree that because of this increasing mobile prominence, Google is favoring in their search results websites optimized for smartphones over those that do not adapt (Brooks “Online Visibility”). For this reason, Google has provided a “mobile-friendly test” located at www.google.com/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly/ (Long).

Search Engine Optimization

None of the entrepreneurs that the researcher of this thesis interviewed or studied through secondary sources mentioned major search engine optimization (SEO) strategies as part of their marketing plans. Therefore, this thesis will not delve deeply into SEO topics such as keyword optimization or Google AdWords because those strategies were used only sparingly by the entrepreneurs studied for this thesis. While

those entrepreneurs make their entire livelihoods from their craft and promotional methods primarily outside of SEO, they surely understand Chris Guillebeau's assertion in *The \$100 Startup* that "whether you have a website or a storefront, without people who regularly drop by to see your offer, you have no business" (Guillebeau 188). Therefore, *basic* practices for getting an entrepreneur's website or online content to appear in relevant searches will be discussed in this section. Since one of the goals of this thesis is to provide cost-efficient marketing options for entrepreneurs, most of these practices are organic as opposed to paid, so that an entrepreneur with little digital marketing experience can still execute them without a high financial risk.

Submission to Search Engine

Entrepreneur online contributor Derek Gehl suggests that business owners to "submit" their websites to major search engines so they have the ability to appear in search results within "two to six weeks" after submission (Gehl). To submit a website to Google, Bing, Yahoo!, AOL, MSN, and other common search engines simultaneously for free, an entrepreneur can visit: http://www.entireweb.com/free_submission.

Linking

"Through all of the [search engine] updates and algorithm changes...inbound links are [still] the most influential signal of trust and authority," asserted Jonathan Long in his article "6 Changes Your 2015 SEO Strategy Must Focus On" (Long). Brian Dean, founder of an SEO training company called Backlinko, agrees, "the more links pointed to a page...in Google's eyes, the higher quality page that is" (Brooks "Inbound Links").



Figure 2.20: Greenstein on *Southern Living* ("A Wintry White Out")

For instance, freelance food writer Cara Greenstein has articles published on *Southern Living's* blog (Fig. 2.20), *The Scout Guide*, and *StyleBlueprint*, and they all include links to her own blog *Caramelized*, thereby "increas(ing) online traffic and readership" for her website (Greenstein).

Besides penning stories for fellow blogs like Greenstein has, Dean suggests a “content roadshow” strategy in which entrepreneurs find websites on which a link to their own content “makes sense” and ask that site owner to place the link “editorially” (Brooks “Inbound Links”). Dean explains that even if the link is not immediate, a website owner might remember the entrepreneur’s pitch and use his or her link in the near future because it is easier than taking the time to search for other new sources (“Inbound Links”).

In his interview on *The Marketing Agents Podcast*, Dean also mentions several tools that could help entrepreneurs navigate the linking landscape and find websites

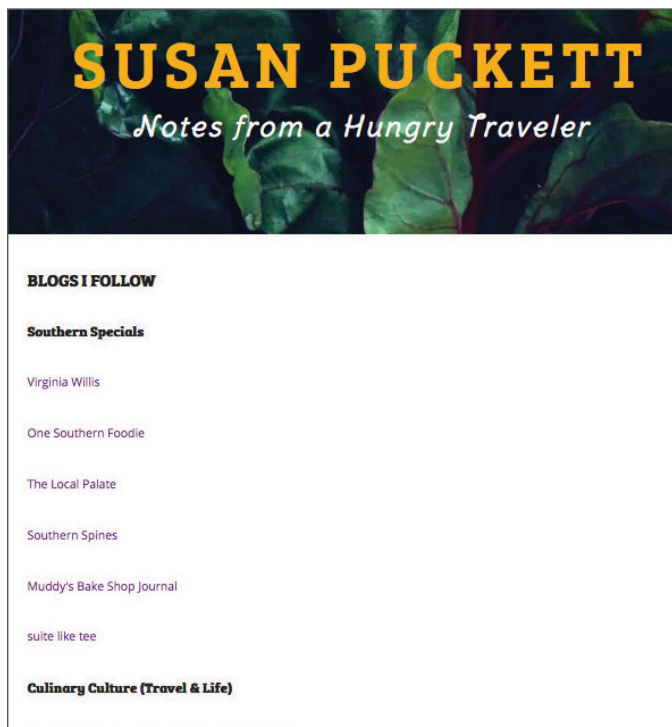


Figure 2.21: Example of a “resource page” linking to content relevant to author Susan Puckett’s writing and interests

they could potentially solicit for links. Ahrefs.com informs a user of “all the links pointed to” whatever site they choose, indicating sites that may be open to linking to an entrepreneur’s content (“Inbound Links”). Typing “keyword+inurl:links” into a search engine yields “hundreds of...resource pages” to which entrepreneurs could request their links be added (Fig. 2.21). “Check My Links,” a Chrome browser tool, lists broken links on any given page, so an entrepreneur

can email that site owner to suggest replacing the broken link with his or her own link (“Inbound Links”).

Another linking strategy used by *Walking in Memphis in High Heels* blogger Laura Boswell is termed “linkups.” Boswell partners with two fellow bloggers to host a weekly

linkup (Fig. 2.22), which is based on a certain style trend she selects. Then any fellow blogger can post a link to her own content on that designated trend on *Walking in Memphis in High Heels* (Fig. 2.23). Linkups are essentially a free method to generate traffic from the audiences of the host bloggers.



Figure 2.22: Trend Spin Linkup hosts present their weekly theme (Boswell)



Figure 2.23: Bloggers share their links on the host's blog (Boswell)

Local SEO

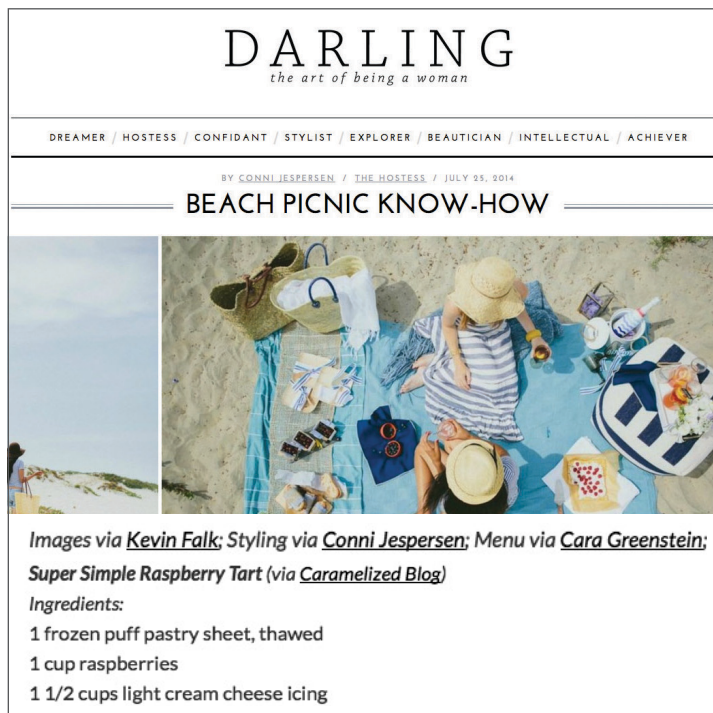
For those entrepreneurs with a local target audience, basic local SEO practices could be beneficial. In order to appear in local search results, LocalSEOGuide.com founder Andy Shotland advises entrepreneurs to post “actual, physical address(es)” and phone numbers on their websites (Brooks “Local”). If the business exists in multiple areas, Shotland recommends creating separate pages within the website for each location and ensuring that they all have “unique text,” rather than information copied and pasted from each other (“Local”).

Shifting focus to external best practices, Shotland suggests the entrepreneur claim his or her “Google My Business Page” and profiles on business directories such as Yellowpages.com and Yelp, as well as local or industry listings, and place on all of them contact information identical to that from the original website (“Local”). Chrome’s free “NAP Hunter”—which stands for name, address, and phone number—can find any

business profiles that may already exist so the entrepreneur can change any incorrect contact information (“Local”). Additionally, an entrepreneur can casually mention to his or her loyal customers that a location mention in an online product or service review would help the business’s standings in local search results (“Local”).

Blogs

A blog can provide an entrepreneur’s potential customers with “a more personal look into” his or her daily life, through content such as “photo outtakes...or sketches that show...[the entrepreneur’s] process” (Ilasco 63). Blogs can also present valuable networking and advertising opportunities for an entrepreneur.



“I...partnered with a style blogger in San Diego...through a table styling/menu series on our respective blogs, and publications such as *Darling* (Fig. 2.24) magazine and *West Elm* have picked up the pieces,” said freelance food writer Cara Greenstein (Greenstein).

Similarly, Long Beach, California photographer Matt Armendariz said in

Figure 2.24: Greenstein’s *Darling* post (Jespersen) his *Creative Inc.* interview, “sometimes a bunch of us food bloggers in L.A. will get together in person for dinners or to host events” (Ilasco 66). *Creative Inc.*’s Meg Ilasco and Joy Cho suggest pitching such partnerships “just like traditional press” with a “personal e-mail to one blog editor at a time,” so each blogger gets the opportunity for a unique story before anyone else (63).

Entrepreneurs can make their own blog posts from anywhere using a simple application called Stellar, with clean, magazine style layout choices and a finished

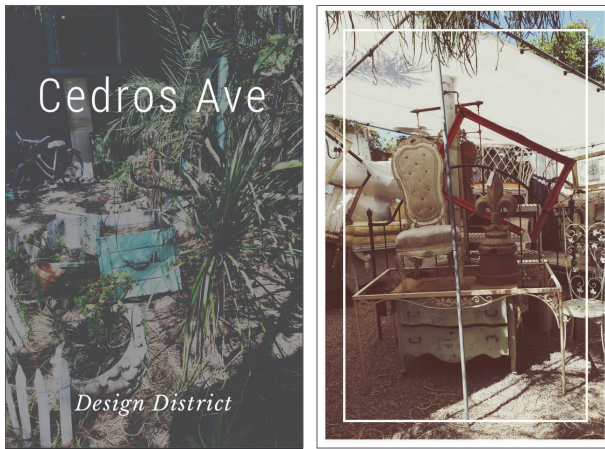


Figure 2.25: Part of a Stellar blog post

product that flips like actual pages on a smartphone or tablet device. Stellar stories (Fig. 2.25) are also viewable on desktop computers and can be posted on social media outlets or shared with links in emails and text messages.

Also, the app itself is a social media outlet, where users can view, like, and comment on fellow publishers' stories.

As for advertising, blogs that an entrepreneur's customers might frequent are "pretty quick and inexpensive [places]...to get more exposure fast" (Ilasco 67). For targeting advertising through blogs, Etsy shop owner Rachel Fisher recommends Fish Indie. Fish Indie provides "circles" of blogs on specific topics, on which an entrepreneur can advertise for \$10 a month per ad (Eleazu "Rachel's").

Marketplaces

Etsy

"The illusion is if I have a website, everybody's going to find me...[but] that's not the way it works" said Etsy jewelry designer Tina St. John (Eleazu "Tina St. John"). However, with Etsy, St. John says "the marketplace is [already] there" and sellers have access to "support" and "teams" they would not have if they were selling from their own independent websites ("Tina St. John").

Etsy seller Kara Lamerato was introduced to her team, Team Unity, when they placed her product in their treasury (Fig. 2.26) and she received "astronomical favorites and clicks for that item" (Eleazu "Kara's"). Lamerato explains that her team is "very diligent, very disciplined" about "favoriting and clicking and viewing" each other's items ("Kara's"). Also through Etsy, Lamerato, who sells "place card holder(s)," has formed a relationship with a calligrapher, and they are consistently "sending business back and forth" as their products go "hand-in-hand" ("Kara's").

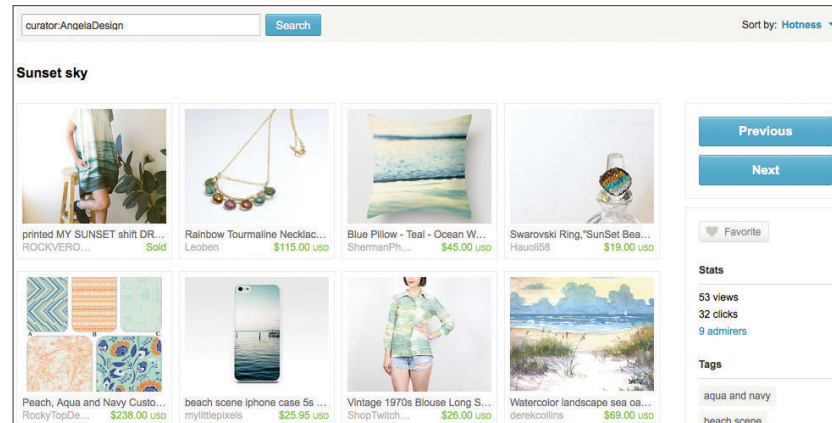


Figure 2.26: Example of an Etsy treasury

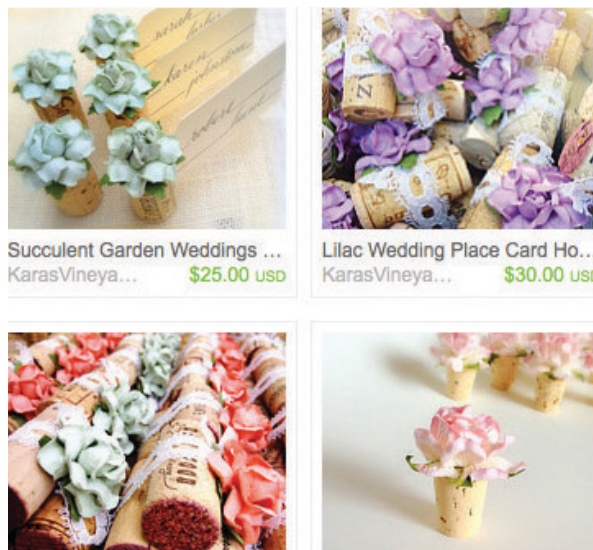


Figure 2.27: Lamerato's Etsy product photos (Lamerato)

Beyond these strategic business partnerships, Lamerato believes attractive photos (Fig. 2.27) are crucial to her success on Etsy because of the platform's visual likeness to Pinterest ("Kara's"). She believes her photos can "catch a buyer's eye" and make her want to select Lamerato's item "on a page with 50 other products" ("Kara's"). Lamerato describes her photos as "simple, polished, [and] professional grade,"

though she actually takes them with her iPad or iPhone, and adjusts their lighting with Picasa filters and an occasional "soft glow or...blur effect" ("Kara's").

Storefront

An alternative or supplement to Etsy or other online marketplaces is Storefront, a website through which an entrepreneur can "rent a retail space...daily, monthly, [or] weekly" (Eleazu "Pop-Up"). Options include full or shared rental of "a booth at a market...a space at a mall...or a street level store" ("Pop-Up"). On the website, a potential renter will find for each shop photos, dimensions, names of "nearby retailers," and contact information for the owner of the location ("Pop-Up"). When an owner

accepts a request for rental, the renter pays through the Storefront website (Fig. 2.28), and automatically receives insurance for his or her pop up shop (“Pop-Up”).

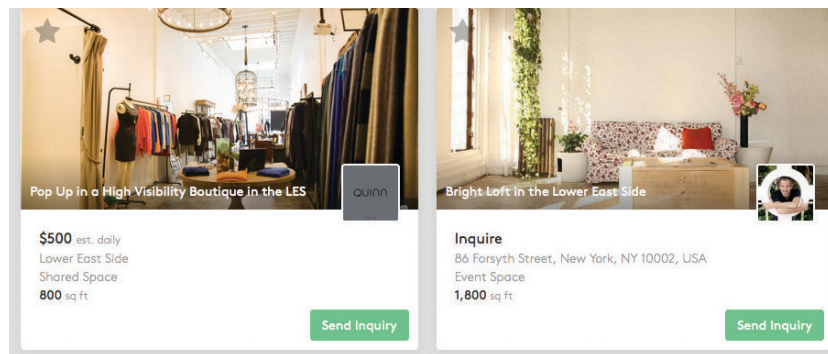


Figure 2.28: Listings on Storefront’s website

According to Storefront cofounder Tristan Pollock, many online sellers want to set up a physical “pop up” shop for the December holidays or for various events in their cities such as “fashion week” or “South by Southwest” (“Pop-Up”). Pollock claims Storefront gives these sellers “access [to] really amazing...shopping streets that...[they] wouldn’t otherwise be able to [rent] because there are no vacancies” (“Pop-Up”).

Storefront began in New York and San Francisco, but there are an increasing number of available locations in cities throughout the United States. For those far away from any of these cities, Pollock suggests travelling and purchasing “a little bit longer



Figure 2.29: A booth at SoLo

rent” or participating in “group pop-ups,” where not every seller has to be present (“Pop-Up”). Other shared retail opportunities are available through marketplaces like SoLo in Solano Beach, California’s Cedros Avenue Design District (Fig. 2.29). According to its website, SoLo is a “4,000 square-foot retail store, with more than a dozen distinctive boutiques under one roof” (“Media Kit”).

Chapter 3: Differentiation

There is a common strand throughout most of the tactics discussed in the previous chapters that allows entrepreneurs to make sales over their competition. Seth Godin, a self-proclaimed “serial entrepreneur,” addresses this commonality claiming that “every successful business has a monopoly—a monopoly on what it makes that someone else can’t make the way they make it” (Godin “Freelancer”). Godin is referring to the successful differentiation of a product or service from others in the marketplace to achieve sales among competition. He believes differentiation is based on the unique “value” a consumer perceives in a product or service, and that perception is achieved by entrepreneurs who are “telling a story...that resonates with people enough that they want to give you money” (“Freelancer”). This section discusses storytelling techniques and examples that will help an entrepreneur to differentiate his or her product from that of the competition. This differentiation, when projected to members of the entrepreneur’s network through new media, can ultimately result in sales and potential brand loyalty.

Target

A traditional business plan includes not only observation of “what makes you stand out from the competition” but also recognition of the target market to whom the business will stand out, as well as that target’s desires and locations (Ilasco 48). Seth Godin believes finding a target audience is imperative because “nothing is for everyone” (Godin “Adjusting”). For instance, as he mentions in his Startup School workshop, “the vast majority of people who have a phone never used an iPhone,” and “the vast majority of people in India do not have indoor plumbing” (“Adjusting”).

World Domination Summit host Chris Guillebeau has found through his personal entrepreneurial ventures that target markets often are not defined by

typical demographics like gender, age, or race (Guillebeau 75). For example, the target market for one of his products consisted of “pro-change” people “who wanted to live unconventional, remarkable lives” and were “pursuing a big dream while also making the world a better place for others” (76).

When the best target market has been found, Guillebeau believes the seller will be making an “offer...[they] can’t refuse,” just like “marathon runners do not need to be sold on the benefits of fresh oranges after three hours of running” (113). While tailoring promotions and products to this target market will give an entrepreneur the best opportunity for sales, freelance author Susan Puckett warns entrepreneurs to “pay attention to trends but do not be a slave to them” because “people can generally see right through it” (Puckett). Puckett prefers choosing a target that “gets you,” without “worry(ing) about the ones who don’t” because from experience she has discovered that a truly loyal customer base will “stay with you and keep growing” (Puckett).

Branding

“Consistent brand...identification will carry your audience through any product or offering,” says freelance blogger Cara Greinstein from experience (Greenstein).



Figure 3.1: Branded logo
(*Caramelized*)

She explains her own brand name (Fig. 3.1) “Caramelized” as “a nickname, verb, and adjective of my lifestyle” (Greenstein).

To build a foundation for branding like Greenstein’s, *Creative Inc.* authors Meg Ilasco and

Joy Cho suggest determining a business “personality” by listing “qualities you think your brand should embody,” particularly ones that match the business’s “unique point of view, style, and vision” while staying “relevant to your target market” (Ilasco 52). However, Ilasco and Cho warn business owners that anything “overly self-promotional” may repel clients, so the execution of branding must possess “subtlety” and a “certain mystique” (53). Once a brand concept has been chosen, they advise an entrepreneur to apply it to the “design,” “communications,” and “behavior” of his or her company (52).

Design

A business's design, as defined in *Creative Inc.*, includes its “logo, business card, letterhead, website, colors, [and] typefaces” (52). Ilasco and Cho advocate keeping



Figure 3.2: Business cards by/for Anna Woodward Design (Creative Inc. interviewee), cleverly tying “Woodward” to a wood texture (“New Woodward Cards”)

a business card (Fig. 3.2) simple with a logo, website URL, and necessary contact information, yet creative enough to “make a client want to find out more about you” (62).

If the entrepreneur herself does not have the skills to design the brand, Etsy shop owner Kara Lamerato recommends finding a friend or acquaintance who can affordably create the brand visuals, like she did (Eleazu “Kara’s”).

Most importantly, Etsy jewelry designer Tina St. John advises entrepreneurs not to “settle for seconds” in the aesthetics of their brands because mediocrity will not “captivate people” and differentiate the company from the competition (Eleazu “Tina St. John”).

Communications

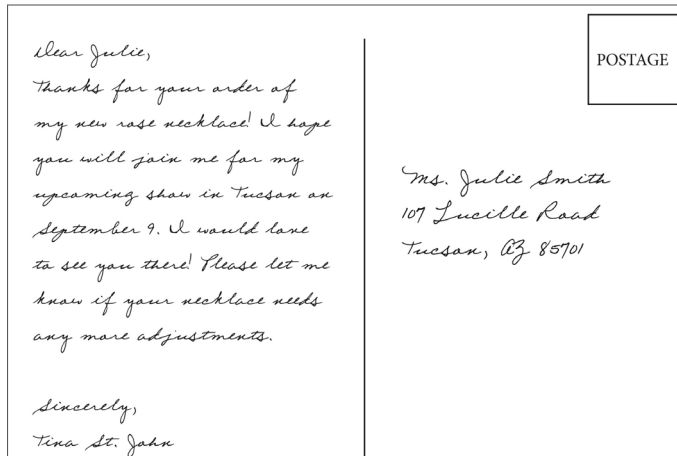
The next area of a business's promotions in which *Creative Inc.* suggests applying branding is in communications, or “visual and verbal messages, including advertising, public relations, and any promotional tools used to get new jobs” (Ilasco 52). For example, Etsy painter Rachel Fisher provides prospective clients with brochures featuring work samples and a “blurb about how it works,” including “steps and average turn around times” for projects (Eleazu “Rachel’s”).

Behavior

The third area in which Ilasco and Cho suggest applying branding is “behavior,” which includes the “mission statement...interaction with clients...[and] your reputation” (Ilasco 52). They believe this includes how the entrepreneur behaves in networking situations, and how he or she “verbally” styles correspondence (54).

Personal Touches

Beyond basic branding, personal touches that surprise clients and endear the entrepreneur’s business to them can prove quite effective, according to several freelance sellers consulted for this thesis. “Not everything needs to be through an email,” proclaims Southwestern jewelry designer Tina St. John in her interview on the *Etsy Conversations Podcast* (Eleazu “Tina St. John”). St. John has actually seen better



attendance at her jewelry shows when she sends out postcards (Fig. 3.3) she prints through Vista Prints (“Tina St. John”). She has found that her clients enjoy the “personal note(s)” she writes to them on these physical images of her product that they can “put on the refrigerator” to remember her upcoming shows (“Tina St. John”).



Figure 3.4: Woodward’s Client appreciation - temporary tatoos, saying to the client “our love for you will never be temporary” (Woodward Design)

Creative Inc.’s Ilasco and Cho agree that a “custom-made calendar or notepad” is more “clever” than “obnoxious” in terms of promotions (Ilasco 69). They also note, “if someone likes an item you’ve designed enough to keep it out on her desk,” that bodes well for potential business opportunities (69).

Ideas for wowing current clients come from Amanda Woodward, a Canadian graphic designer interviewed for *Creative Inc.* Woodward says her team treated their customers (Fig. 3.4) to a “party at a wine bar” at which they “raffled off some of...[her] illustrations” to celebrate the company’s five year anniversary (167).

For loyal customers during Christmastime, they “baked homemade granola and placed it in wooden boxes” (167).

In Chris Guillebeau’s *The \$100 Startup*, Omaha fashion designer Megan Hunt describes her personal touches as “strategic giving” (Guillebeau 154). For example, when she debuts a “new line of dresses,” she makes a few that are “custom” for “two or three influential bloggers,” who post about them, yielding many new clients for Hunt (154). Hunt also regularly surprises a few customers with complimentary overnight shipping or placing a “favorite book with a handwritten note” (Fig. 3.5) into the package (154). Hunt says she ships a dress as if it is a “gift to my best friend” (154).

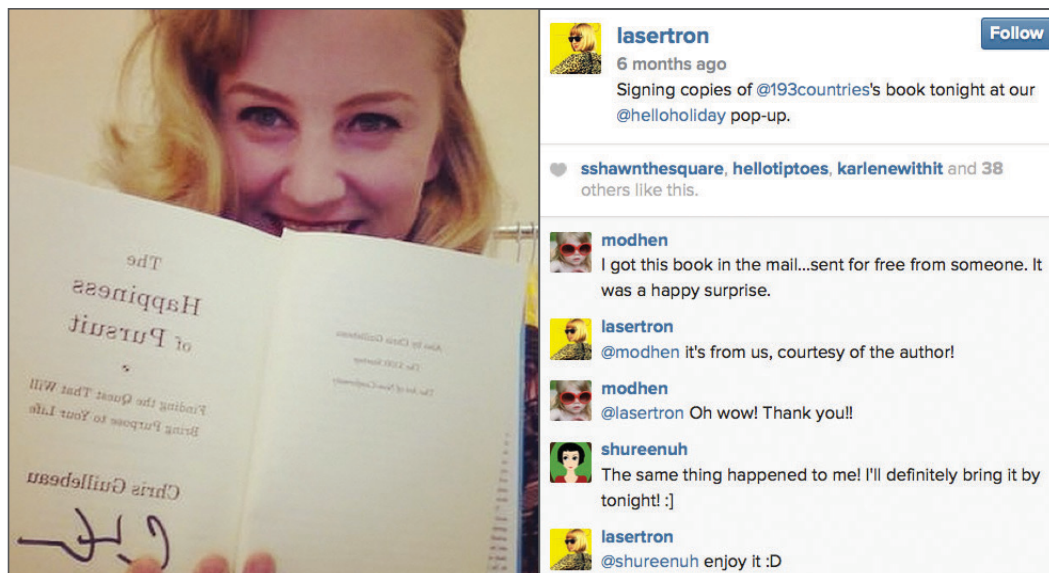


Figure 3.5: Example of the effectiveness of Hunt’s special packaging (Lasertron)

As Chris Guillebeau himself says, “the point is that the small things count,” especially for a new entrepreneur aiming to craft an attractive brand and grow his or her customer base somewhat organically without a huge outlay of advertising dollars (123).

Credibility

In his Startup School workshop, Seth Godin highlights the three types of “revenue” he believes a business can earn: “the revenue of cash, the revenue of attention and trust, and the revenue of referral” (Godin “Adjusting”). While sales are the ultimate goal of any business, “the revenue of attention and trust,” as well as any resulting “referral(s),”

can differentiate a business that might otherwise struggle to make sales over stiff competition (“Adjusting”). “Attention and trust” essentially mean credibility, and two of the major ways credibility can be achieved in the public sphere are through industry award recognition and positive media appearances (“Adjusting”).



Figure 3.6: Awards that Farmhouse (Memphis, TN) announced on their Facebook (Farmhouse)

Whether the goal is to “attach the label ‘award-winning’ to your work,” (Fig. 3.6) or create impressive content for a “newsletter or blog,” participating in industry “competitions” can only be positive for a business’s reputation (Ilasco 67). Credibility could come from the “boldface industry names who jury” the contest, or from a “peer” who has succeeded in similar categories (67).

Additionally, “these days, the media can very quickly rocket well-received work in the public sector into all sorts of spheres of influence,” claims Philadelphia industrial designer Josh Owen in his *Creative Inc.* interview (160). *Creative Inc.*’s Meg Ilasco and Joy Cho recommend an entrepreneur pitch stories about his or her business endeavors to either an “industry” publication or “general mass-market” media (62). Ilasco and Cho give the examples of submitting a “poster you illustrated for a charitable organization” to a “design magazine” or offering a “lifestyle magazine” a glimpse into “your cool workspace” (Fig. 3.7) for a story (62).



Figure 3.7: May Designs’ workspace featured on GlitterGuide (Chelsie)

However, they advise entrepreneurs to submit to

“one magazine at a time starting with the one you want the most” because any media organization prefers to be the only one of its kind featuring a trendy new topic (62).

Benefits (Over Features)

“We’re not selling horse rides...We’re offering [the] freedom...[to] be someone they may have never ever considered before,” said Barbara Varian of her dude ranch business in Parkfield, California (Guillebeau 26). *The \$100 Startup*’s Chris Guillebeau explains how Varian is using “emotional benefits” like “Be a cowboy” over “descriptive features” like “Ride horses” to differentiate her business and solicit new clients (269). As a second example, Guillebeau describes how Jaden Hair’s “Steamy Kitchen” recipe website differentiates itself from other websites with recipes by demonstrating that Hair’s “work helps families spend quality time making and enjoying delicious food” (30). Freelance food writer Susan Puckett urges entrepreneurs to not only relay exciting benefits of their products to their target audiences, but also “continually refine your message and practice it on people you trust...to gauge their enthusiasm” (Puckett).

Conclusion

“As an entrepreneur, one cannot expect the press to come to you –it’s about putting yourself out there with poise and confidence,” says *Caramelized* blogger Cara Greenstein (Greenstein). This thesis aimed to give entrepreneurs a host of methods to do exactly as Greenstein described. However, every entrepreneur need not use every promotional method discussed in this thesis. Internet Marketing Center CEO Derek Gehl recommends entrepreneurs use “one or two marketing strategies really well,” because he has observed many of his customers doing so and “dramatically increas(ing)...[their] traffic –and sales” (Gehl). If implementing even “one or two” promotional tactics is too overwhelming for an entrepreneur, there is still another step to take before considering an agency or other costly backups. Freelance author Susan Puckett speaks from experience when she claims, “having an intern can be invaluable” (Puckett). Puckett recognizes they are “often far more adept at technology than seasoned professionals,” meaning they can “save hours of time updating calendars on a website...assembling mailing lists....creating blog posts,” and introducing the entrepreneur to new social media outlets (Puckett). College interns might even be able to work for school credit in lieu of pay. As an example, artist Dorothy Collier’s internship job listing can be found in Appendix B.

Even if hiring an intern, the entrepreneur should still design his or her overall promotional plan to include the three major components found in successful entrepreneurs’ marketing strategies: networking, new media, and differentiation.

Networking: Entrepreneurs can participate in the “connection economy” (Godin “Adjusting”) by mentioning their businesses to friends, family, and former coworkers, and creating clever “leave-behinds” to cement themselves in the memories of new acquaintances (Ilasco 61). From selling at and hosting events (Conclusion

Fig. 1), to joining a business incubator or establishing an affiliate program, there are unlimited ways to expand a customer base. Entrepreneurs can maintain these customer relationships by showing client appreciation (especially during the holidays) and use existing relationships as social proof or endorsements to attract new interest.



Conclusion Figure 1: Networking through events (Memphis Indie Holiday Market)



Conclusion Figure 2: Unpublished page post ad on Facebook targeted at brides (Katherine Beck)

New Media: Electronic media can be both cost efficient and observably effective for an entrepreneur with a tight marketing budget. Basic search engine optimization and linking strategies can drive traffic to an optimized website, while blogs, Instagram, Facebook (Conclusion Fig. 2), Twitter, and Pinterest allow entrepreneurs to personally connect with their target markets. Online marketplaces and shared selling spaces are fresh spins on classic retail that invite customers to experience new excitement in shopping.

Differentiation: To create a big presence for a small business, entrepreneurs can hone in on specific target markets, give their companies memorable personalities through branded designs and actions, and add personal touches that few other sellers



Conclusion Figure 3: Dorothy Collier on *Southern Bride*'s blog (Lindsey)

can claim. Awards and press mentions (Conclusion Fig. 3) can provide third party endorsements for a business, while emphasizing the benefits of a product over its features allows consumers to perceive real value in an entrepreneur's offerings.

The right recipe of networking, new media, and differentiation has proved itself in dollar amounts and pleased customers for the writers, artists, and other entrepreneurs featured in this thesis.

If they could be their own marketing departments, at least in the beginning,

then so can any budding business owner with the willingness to experiment and the drive to connect with the right people, at the right time, through the right media.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Research Process and Disclosures

The researcher began with secondary sources, from the curated advice books *The \$100 Startup* by Chris Guillebeau and *Creative, Inc.* by Meg Mateo Ilasco and Joy Deangdeelert Cho, to marketing related articles on *Entrepreneur* magazine's website, to raw interviews with entrepreneurs and marketing experts on the podcasts *Etsy Conversations*, *The Marketing Agents*, and *Seth Godin's Startup School*. All secondary sources were vetted to be at least as recent as 2010, and most specific advice on digital marketing or marketplaces came from podcast interviews published during 2014 or 2015 in the year preceding this thesis publication.

To verify all of this information, the researcher compared it with personal interviews conducted with tenants of the Renasant Center for Ideas (a business incubator in Tupelo, MS), two focus groups with University of Mississippi students, and email interviews with the following entrepreneurs: *Eat Drink Delta* author Susan Puckett, freelance writer Natalie Higdon, *Home & Hill* magazine editor Anna Gillbert, *Caramelized* food blogger Cara Greenstein, and Tennessee native artist Dorothy Collier.

The personal interviews and focus groups were conducted as part of an awareness marketing campaign for the Renasant Center for Ideas. The two 30-minute focus groups of roughly 8 University of Mississippi students each included various undergraduate and graduate classifications, many majors, both genders, and mixed backgrounds. As previously mentioned, the interview participants were Renasant Center for Ideas (RCFI) tenants, so they were willing to meet in person because they had a vested interest in the project.

For the other entrepreneurs not associated with the RCFI, the researcher believed e-mail interviews would be most appropriate because for freelancers and small business owners, their own time is an integral part of their capital success. Therefore, the researcher felt that she would have a better response rate if she kept the correspondence brief. Also, a simple question or two via email allowed the interviewees to give more thoughtful responses. Most of the e-mails posed the question: "What would be your

marketing advice to someone starting a business from scratch?” because the answer to this question would potentially reveal the most valuable marketing tactics that that entrepreneur had discovered to date. Some emails also included the following additional questions, in order to procure more in depth information:

- What is the most effective method you have used to promote your brand?
- What is the most creative method you have used to promote your brand?
- How have you garnered press coverage for your business?

The research for this thesis concentrated primarily on freelance creative professionals or solo entrepreneurs, with a secondary focus on those who started a business solo or through partnership and grew to hire a few employees. The thesis purposefully excludes from its study entrepreneurs who have a large, solid regional or national presence, because the goal was to discover how entrepreneurs promote themselves, not how their marketing department does so for them and their already booming business.

Under the principle of full disclosure, the researcher will state that she sells graphic design work for small businesses and wedding stationery designs under the Etsy shop name Suite Like Tee. She also maintains a blog by the same name at suiteliketee.blogspot.com. While the researcher had a vested interest in finding answers to marketing questions an entrepreneur might have, throughout her research she remained open to finding and writing about any effective method of promotion by entrepreneurs, regardless of whether she planned to apply it specifically to her own business.

APPENDIX B: Dorothy Collier's Internship Listing

I am in need of one or two unpaid interns and can interview them anytime on March 19th & 20th. This internship will give the student the chance to see first hand a day to day scenario of all of the different daily tasks of a working artist, with emphasis on fulfilling wholesale and online orders as well as how to prepare and set up for art festivals/shows.

Requirements:

- 5-10 hours a week, currently on Mondays, Thursdays, and some Fridays
- Will be able to work during the summer
- Has their own transportation. My studio is in my home, 1802 Harbert Ave, in the heart of Central Gardens.
- Being able to clearly communicate their schedule via email or text.
- Available for pay a couple of times a year at shows (Double Decker on April 25th in Oxford, MS), Cooper Young Festival, Christmas Holiday Shows
- Comfortable working alongside a cute, 6 pound studio puppy named Oxford

Job Description:

- glue backgrounds on canvas
- spray canvases
- wire/hook canvases
- make tags
- package greeting cards and prints
- make FedEx/ArtCenter runs on occasion
- possible times of photographing artwork
- comfortable use of a computer and possibly bring their own MAC laptop

Feel free to email me back or call 901-604-0044.

Best,

Dorothy Collier

Source: <http://www.dorothycollier.com/internships>